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TO PRESIDENT

On Thursday, 166 members voted by proxy, taking advantage of the pandemic-era policy that Republicans have vowed to end in the next Congress,

Dec. 26, 2022



By Justin Papp, CQ-Roll Call (via TNS).

Whether it was because of holiday plans, a “bomb cyclone” or the fact that some of them won’t be doing this job in a few weeks, the House was definitely not packed for

the final votes of the year as the chamber passed the fiscal 2023 omnibus spending

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“The members have planes to catch, gifts to wrap, toys to assemble, carols to sing, religious services to attend to,” said Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., during what would likely be her last speech from the floor as speaker on Friday.

Pelosi's was a more forgiving take on the scant attendance in the House chamber. Republicans were scornful of their Democratic colleagues who, they said, were abusing the policy.

“The American people deserve us to be here over Christmas actually fighting for them, instead of trying to catch planes while half this body are going to vote by proxy,” Rep. Chip Roy, R-Texas, said before the House voted on laying the groundwork for debate of the spending package. “Half this body's not even going to be here and they're lying. They're lying on forms saying that they're voting by proxy for COVID.”

After the bill's passage by a 225-201 vote, Roy raised an objection, saying that by his count there were 226 votes by proxy, and he asked if there was a “physical quorum present as required under the Constitution.”

North Carolina Democratic Rep. G.K. Butterfield, who was in the presiding officer's chair, said rules adopted for the Congress say that members “recording their presence by proxy are counted for the purpose of establishing a quorum.”

Proxy voting was adopted by the House in May 2020, during the height of the pandemic's first wave, as a safety measure. The rule change allowed lawmakers to designate a colleague to vote on their behalf, provided they sign a letter stating they are “unable to physically attend proceedings in the House Chamber due to the ongoing public health emergency.” Those letters are logged by staff in the House clerk's office and posted online.

The rule was not meant for convenience, nor was it meant to be permanent. Pelosi

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She voted no, while Illinois Republican Rep. Adam Kinzinger, who voted Monday on the select Jan. 6 committee for criminal referrals against former President Donald Trump, voted for the bill by absentee.

Proxies grow on fly-out days

Indeed, days when Congress is due to leave town are often when members take advantage of the rule, even when there isn't a dramatic storm or family holiday on the horizon.

An average of 62 House members voted by proxy on so-called fly-out days from the time the rule was implemented through October, according to a [CQ Roll Call analysis of data](#) collected by The Brookings Institution.

By comparison, just 41 members on average voted by proxy on days they weren't either leaving or arriving in Washington.

Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, the Republican from California who is trying to lock down support in his conference to become House speaker on Jan. 3, railed against many aspects of the budget bill from the floor Friday, including earmarks, border spending and the IRS. He also took a parting shot at Democrats who, he said, claim to care about their constituents, but who left before Friday's vote.

"The Democrats care so much about the people that they're home with the people and not here to read the bill or even vote on it," McCarthy said. "I'm not sure you don't put a medal in here, for the people who don't show up for work. Because they care so much."

(Mark Burnett, Daniel Hillburn and Chris Cioffi contributed to this report.)

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